

Spa Education Investment: Adding Value for the Guest

By Ann Brown

Fact: Spas spend more on robes and slippers than they do educating the therapists who put their hands on the clients.

As a spa director or owner, you don't have to spend more on education than you do robes, but it is important to take note of how you invest in a premier spa experience. Plush robes and slippers are nice touches, but can't compare to the impact that a good therapist has on turning clients into your biggest fans.

By educating your spa team, you invest in the people that truly sell the spa. More value driven than ever before, spa-savvy guests want more and more from spas: They want life-changing experiences that stay with them, long after they leave the robe and slippers behind. Investing in education and focusing on your staff is sound strategy for building lasting client relationships.

As an educator and founding member of the American Spa Therapy Education and Certification Council (ASTECC), I recently traveled to Montage Resort & Spa in Laguna Beach, California to evaluate their staff in Aroma-Reflex therapy. Montage staff had undergone 24 hours of CEU hours in Aroma-Reflex through ASTECC, and one of the therapists was working toward educator status. Once fully certified, the therapist will become an on-property ASTECC instructor, providing in-house training for staff and new hires.

Since its inception in 2004, Montage has been a leader in the spa industry, forging new standards and practices for education. Their dedication to the spa experience earned them 5-star spa ranking by Mobil, the first-ever resort spa designated as such. Certifying an in-house educator is a progressive step, demonstrating how education in the spa industry has evolved in recent years.

The core curriculum in most massage schools covers the basics, glossing over disciplines, such as Reflexology and Thermalism. As a result, therapists often graduate believing they are fully trained, but their knowledge of specialized modalities is superficial at best. Advanced education takes their skills to a higher level that exceeds clients' expectations. Advanced education is the difference between a massage and a true spa therapeutic experience at the hands of a professional.

Montage's investment in therapist education has produced an unparalleled level of treatment consistency within the industry. Montage therapists certify in a particular discipline (Hydrotherapy, Aromatherapy, etc) before being allowed to perform the service on a guest. In so many spas, clients request a treatment, assuming the therapist is adequately trained - a confidence that is then often undermined by a poor quality treatment. Massage schools typically provide therapists with four hours of reflexology training, not enough knowledge to satisfy a discerning guest.

Sixteen hours of training, on the other hand, produces another kind of spa experience - one that today's spa-savvy guests will embrace and return for, again and again.

In the United States, a trend is developing. Guests want more from spas. They want to make a connection with their spa and their therapists. Guests want more information, more insight on how spas can enhance the quality of their lives. When your

staff understands the physiological benefits and theories governing a spa therapy, they enhance their value to the guest and to your spa.

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